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A

FREE ADDRESS

T O

Protestant Dissenters,

On the SUBJECT of the

LORD'S SUPPER.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S. /

Quantum est in rebus inane.

LUCRETIVS.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. JOHNSON, in Paternoster-Row.

M. DCC. LXVIII.

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TO

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On the subject of the

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T H E
P R E F A C E.

THE following address was first made to a particular society of Protestant Dissenters; but, as the occasion of it is by no means particular, it was thought there would be a propriety in making it more general by publication. The Protestant Dissenters, of all denominations, have certainly distinguished themselves by the noble opposition they have made to the progress of superstition, in a great variety of forms; but, like all other reformers from popery, they have stopped short too soon. Like other reformers also, they have departed too far from the principles

iv THE PREFACE.

on which they set out; and, instead of promoting the cause in which they so boldly embarked, they have rather damped that spirit which their own generous example could not fail to inspire. Nay, without considering the inconsistency of their conduct, they have, in a great measure, denied their posterity the use of the necessary means of farther reformation, by restricting that freedom of inquiry, for which they had been such strenuous advocates, when it answered their own purpose.

The views of man are always confined; and when our limited and partial ends are gained, we often can conceive no farther use of the means which were necessary to gain them. When a law, rule, or maxim of any kind favours ourselves, we can easily enter into the reasons of it, and readily approve it; but when that is no longer the case, and our adversary begins to avail himself of it, we wish the law abrogated, and, in that state of mind, can generally find reasons enough why it should be so.

Those

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Those great men who began the reformation from popery, and those great men, also, who would have carried it farther than the imperfect state to which it has been brought in the church of England were, each of them, fully sensible of certain abuses, and of a certain number only. Indeed it would have been miraculous if, educated as they were, they could have been sensible of them all. We, who think we can improve upon their plan, have our *ne plus ultra* somewhere. Those reformers, therefore, of course, fancied that, were those particular abuses rectified, every thing would be right; and every advance farther than their own ideas of perfection, must have appeared to them as really an error and an abuse, as those which they had reformed: and it is certain that, in all cases, there are two extremes for one just medium. It is, likewise, true, that the ardour of reformation may justly be supposed to carry men too far, and that mankind do frequently pass from one extreme to the opposite. Those reformers, therefore, having

gained every thing they thought desirable, had the same motives to oppose all farther reformation, which the persons they dissented from had to oppose them; and being now in the same situation, they would naturally adopt their maxims, in order, like them, to discourage all innovations.

This may serve as an apology for the conduct of those great worthies, whose labours and whose risques we now enjoy, and whose human infirmities we ought, therefore, to bear with. But the same indulgence cannot be claimed by their successors, men who have no extraordinary merit to plead for it; but who, with the common herd of mankind, are content to be just as wise as their parents and instructors were before them. These are no more to us than the heads of the church, immediately before the reformation, were to the first reformers. They acquiesce in a system handed down from their ancestors; we think we can improve upon that system: and there is no argument which they

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they can alledge against our attempts to improve upon it, but what hath been long ago urged against the similar attempts of those very persons, on whose authority they themselves build their faith; persons with whom those arguments had no manner of weight, and whom, for that very reason, they profess to applaud.

In whatever respects we may perceive that the system in which we have been educated retains any tincture of the errors and superstitions of popery, and deviates from the genuine simplicity of the gospel, let us show the vigour and spirit of our ancestors in reforming it. Like them, let us show that we also can think for ourselves; and with the same freedom, and zeal for the common cause, let us endeavour to enlighten the minds of others. Let us treat every subject of religion as we would do those of philosophy. Whenever any opinion is freely canvassed in open daylight, it will be easy to see on which side the truth lies; and may the truth equally prevail against a blind attachment to old opinions

opinions on the one hand, and as unjustifiable a fondness for innovation on the other.

To me, I cannot help saying, it appears, that the present state of christianity is rather critical, and very much requires to be looked into by all its real friends and sincere advocates. Men of good sense, and of cultivated minds in other respects, cannot but be aware of many things which are evidently absurd in the prevailing tenets of the far greater part of christians; and while no real friend of christianity has the courage to show them, that the things they dislike and object to, do not belong to that religion, it can be no wonder that they conceive a prejudice against the whole scheme, and become secret, if not open and avowed infidels. That this is the case at this day, not with the unthinking and the profligate only, but with many persons of reading, of reflection, and of the most irreproachable conduct in life, is well known. It is also apparent, that the number of such persons is daily increasing; and unless
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THE PREFACE. ix

some remedy be applied to the growing evil, we shall, in time, be in the condition of our neighbours the Papists, with whom the thinking men, in the church as well as among the laity, are generally infidels, and all the unthinking are bigots.

Let us, then, sit down to a serious and impartial examination of the objections of deists to christianity, and by no means treat them with that contempt and insolence which they have too often met with, and which they are very far from deserving. But before we attempt the vindication of any thing, let us first consider, whether we have any occasion to vindicate it at all; that is, whether it really belong to our religion; or whether it have only been generally supposed to belong to it. For some of our defenders of christianity, in consequence of attempting too much, appear to me to have done nothing. It will be in vain to offer any vindication of our religion, till it be cleared of such incumbrances as would render any scheme indefensible: and I am rather apprehensive, that

x THE PREFACE.

that the prejudices of the bulk of christians, of Protestants, and even of the Protestant Dissenters, in favour of vulgar errors, are so strong, that the times are not yet quite ripe for a completely rational defence of christianity.

It will easily be perceived, that these reflections were not suggested by the subject of the following short treatise only. I own I had farther views. But in this instance I would willingly give an example of what, I apprehend, would be the most advantageous and successful manner of treating prejudices of long standing; which is first, to exhibit the genuine scripture doctrine upon the subject, and then to trace the corruptions of it in an historical manner; accounting for them as well as we can, and assigning the reasons for the present prevailing opinions. I am persuaded there are persons enow, who, if they were properly encouraged, would be ready to pursue such a plan as this, with respect to several important articles.

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THE PREFACE. xi

It is the more to our purpose to begin with this subject of the Lord's supper, as it affords a striking instance of the very great stress which the generality of serious christians may lay upon an opinion, or a practice, which has clearly no manner of foundation in the gospel itself, but is most evidently a corruption of it. Let it not, therefore, be taken for granted, that every thing must be a part of christianity, which is very generally, and most firmly believed to be so, and which is even considered as of the utmost importance in the scheme.

It is from no low party prejudices, that I think there is more to be expected from Dissenters, and dissenting ministers, than from clergymen of the church of England, in disquisitions of this kind. They may, indeed, suggest improvements, but we only have it in our power to carry them into execution. Where a great number of persons are so joined together, that they must act in concert, and every individual must wait the motions of the whole body, the work of reformation must necessarily go on very slowly,

slowly, if it be not totally obstructed ; but the progress of it may be very rapid, where, as with us, every single society may improve their sentiments and discipline as much as they please, without troubling themselves, in the least, about the opinions or practices of others. Having subscribed to no articles of faith, which we either openly reject, or artfully explain away, we cannot be charged with inconsistency or prevarication, when we call in question received opinions ; and, enjoying no emolument or advantage of any kind, as the price of subscription, there is no shadow of a claim upon us to refund or relinquish any thing, when we renounce whatever we apprehend to be an error ; so long as we profess the christian religion, according as we understand it, which is all that our societies expect from us. It is readily acknowledged, that there are many things unfavourable in our situation ; but let us, for that reason, make the most of what is favourable in it, and exert ourselves, in proportion to what God and the world may justly expect from us.

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THE PREFACE. xiii

I do not pretend to say, that there is any thing materially new in the sentiments of this treatise, or very different from the opinion of the excellent bishop Hoadly on the subject; but the manner of treating it may have some advantage; and, considering the present prevailing opinions and practices relating to it, it is apparent, that another call of mens attention to this subject is not superfluous, and that enough has not been yet said upon it.

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THE SECOND EDITION OF THIS TREATISE, WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS, IS NOW IN THE PRESS.

LONDON, Printed by J. DODD, in Pall-mall, 1741.



A

Free Address, &c.

My Christian Brethren,

Observing that very few, in proportion to the largeness of many of our societies, attend the Lord's supper, I cannot help thinking that the neglect is owing to some general mistake of the proper nature and design of the institution; and I am willing to hope, that a plain and serious address on the subject, may be a means of correcting the mistake, and induce you to reform this practice. I beg, therefore, your candid attention, while, with no more freedom than one christian may always take with another, I endeavour to obviate the prejudices you may possibly have

have entertained relating to this subject. And I rejoice, that many of the societies to whom I am addressing myself, have distinguished themselves by their generous freedom in inquiring into the abuses and corruptions which have crept into christianity, and by encouraging their ministers to show them the way in such necessary examinations.

Without any farther preface, I shall briefly lay before you an account of the nature and design of the Lord's supper, as it may be collected from the evangelists, and from St. Paul; and, after this, I shall point out some of the gross abuses which have been introduced into this institution; and, at the same time, give you the best account I can collect of the causes and manner of their introduction,

To give you the more entire satisfaction upon this subject, I shall fairly recite to you every thing that I find in the New Testament relating to it, even with the repetitions of the different evangelists.

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THE LORD'S SUPPER. 17

This will not take up much room, and by this means you will see, that nothing is overlooked or concealed from you.

Matthew, the first of the evangelists, and who was an eye witness of what he relates, says, ch. xxvi, ver. 26, that, as our Saviour and his apostles were eating the last passover, *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his Disciples; saying, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them; saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Mark, who was not an eye witness, but had his relation from others, seems to have copied this account of Matthew, which he certainly had seen. You will perceive, that the two accounts are almost the same,

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word

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word for word, ch. xiv, ver. 22. *And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them; and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, when he had given thanks, and gave it to them; and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many: Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Had we had no other accounts of the Lord's supper than these two (which in reality, are to be considered but as one) we could not possibly have inferred, that there was any religious institution intended. It would have appeared to have been a thing that was transacted between our saviour and his apostles, previous to his death, but by no means to have been any thing that was to be repeated, even by them, much less by us, and all other christians to the end of the world,

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THE LORD'S SUPPER. 19

The account of Luke, who also had his relation from others, advances one step farther, ch. xxii, ver. 14. *And when the hour was come he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it to them; saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

In this account we find an injunction to the apostles, at least, to repeat this rite. *This do in remembrance of me.* For doing it that once only, and in his presence, could not be said to be in remembrance of him.

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In the book of Acts, ch. ii. ver. 46. we have the first hint, that receiving the Lord's supper was a practice in the christian church. It is there said, that, after the day of pentecost, *the disciples continued daily with one accord in the temple; and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.* But as the account of *eating their meat* is connected with that of their *breaking bread*, we are not quite sure that the Lord's supper is referred to in this passage,

Lastly, it is in the writings of St. Paul that we first distinctly find, that the celebration of the Lord's supper was an established rite in the christian church; that it was not confined to the apostles, or the apostolic age; but was to be continued till Christ's second coming. St. Paul seems to have had his relation from our Lord himself in vision, and he was led to treat of the institution by some gross abuses which had crept into the manner of celebrating it; and therefore he is the more particular in his account of it.

But

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But the first mention St. Paul makes of this institution, is with a view to shew an inconsistency in the conduct of some primitive christians; who, at the same time that they joined in the celebration of it, made no scruple of partaking of the feasts which accompanied heathen sacrifices; the partaking of the Lord's supper being a declaration of their being christians, and the other of their being heathens, 1 Cor. x. 14. *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, fly from idolatry. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? for we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread. The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot partake of the Lord's table, and the table of devils. The whole meaning of this passage, therefore, is, that joining in idolatrous worship is the same thing as renouncing christianity.*

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But the fuller, and more circumstantial account which St. Paul gives of the Lord's supper, was designed to correct a gross mistake, and preposterous practice of the Greeks at Corinth relating to this ordinance. As this rite consisted of eating and drinking in remembrance, and in honour of Christ, the Corinthians seem to have taken it to have been something like the feasts they had been used to hold in honour of their former gods, on which occasions it was usual to eat and drink to excess. For it must be observed, that all the feasts of the Greeks and Romans were in honour of their gods, and of a religious nature. Even stage plays were an appendage to the feasts of Bacchus. Now the Greeks, notwithstanding they termed all the rest of the world barbarians, knew nothing of the politeness and good manners of modern times. It is well known, that they seldom made their social entertainments at a common expence, on account of the quarrels they were apt to fall into about the distribution of the victuals; but most commonly met in some public room, whither

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whither every man brought his own provision ; and, all eating separately, they might converse together, but could have no pretence for quarrelling with any body. It is also well known, that the Corinthians were, of all the Greeks, the most remarkable for their luxury and effeminacy ; and it seems that, in this manner of holding their common entertainments, they celebrated the Lord's supper ; as St. Paul observes, 1 Cor. xi. 20. *When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper : for, in eating, every one taketh before another (that is, before the rest be come) his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in ? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have none. What shall I say to you ? shall I praise you for this ? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you ; that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread ; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you ;*

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you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped; saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily (that is, in the scandalous manner in which the Corinthians did it), shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. That is, they are guilty of abusing and prophaning this ordinance, and the bread and wine in it, which represent the body and blood of Christ. But let a man examine himself, that is, let him consider with himself, that he comes to this supper as to a remembrance of Christ, and not as to a common feast, and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (or, as it ought to have been rendered, judgment) to himself, that is, he is guilty of a practice, which, if he reflect, he cannot but condemn as wrong and

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and preposterous, *not discerning the Lord's body*; not distinguishing the Lord's supper from a common feast. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*; that is, for this reason God visited them with extraordinary sickness, which sometimes terminated in death. But even this judgment, for so scandalous an enormity, was only a fatherly chastisement of God, in order to correct this abuse. They were not condemned everlastingly for it; for the apostle adds, *but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* He concludes his admonition with this advice; *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another; and if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation; and the rest will I set in order when I come.*

All the censure that St. Paul passes upon unworthy communicants, I would observe by the way, relates wholly to such a manner of receiving this ordinance, as is nowhere practised at this day in any christian country.

country. His censures, therefore, are evidently such as no christians at this day can justly apply to themselves.

You have now, my brethren, seen all that the scriptures say concerning this rite of the Lord's supper. How little is it, in comparison of what men have made of it!

Customs, or stated actions in memory of remarkable events, have prevailed in all ages, and in all nations of the world. It is a dictate of nature, in order to keep alive a joyful remembrance of interesting events. The Divine Being himself gave countenance to it on several occasions in the course of the Jewish history; particularly by the appointment of the feast of the passover, in commemoration of the deliverance of the children of Israel from the destruction that came upon the Egyptians. Now, it was during the celebration of this very feast, and perhaps in allusion to it (tho' we have no particular authority for this) that Christ appointed his disciples to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of

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of him; probably, chusing this most natural, chearful, and social of all human actions, as a fit emblem of the chearful and benevolent nature of his religion; and perhaps too, not without a view to his being recollected whenever, upon other occasions, we eat bread and drink wine; that so a grateful remembrance of the greatest benefactor of the human race, might be connected with the most common and familiar actions of our lives, and thereby habitually influence our thoughts and conversation. Alas! how has this easy and chearful institution been debased by human superstition.

If, at the close of this representation, I be asked, what is the Lord's supper; I answer, It is a solemn, but chearful rite, in remembrance of Christ, and of what he has done and suffered for the benefit of mankind. Like other customs, which stand as records of past events, it preserves the memory of the most important of all transactions to the end of the world, even till Christ's second coming. Customs are,
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in many cases, the most useful records of events, as they keep alive the remembrance of them in the minds of all persons concerned in them. This custom of celebrating the Lord's supper may, therefore, be considered as a proof of the most important facts relating to christianity. If they be not true, how could this custom have arisen? Nay, this custom is the only record, that Christ expressly appointed, of his death and sufferings. We nowhere find that he gave any orders to his disciples to write his life, and he wrote nothing himself. These histories, however, though not expressly enjoined, were provided for us in the common course of Divine Providence; and very thankful ought we to be for them; since, without written histories, customs are apt to be perverted, and to degenerate from their original design.

If I be asked, what is the advantage of celebrating this rite; I answer, it is of the same nature as that which results from repeating any custom, in commemoration of any other important event; of the same nature

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nature with the celebration of the passover, for instance, among the Jews. It tends to perpetuate the memory of the transaction recorded by it, and to cherish a grateful and joyful sense of it. In this case, the custom tends to perpetuate the memory of the death of Christ, and to cherish our veneration and love for him. It inflames our gratitude to so great a benefactor, and, consequently, our zeal to fulfil all his commands. Moreover, being the joint action of several, it strengthens our affection to the common cause, to one another, and to all who are engaged in it. If you expect more than this, with respect to yourselves or others, your expectations are unreasonable, enthusiastical, and sure to be disappointed.

If I be asked, *by whom* this rite must be celebrated; I answer, by all professing christians, who are arrived at years of discretion. In nothing that I have read to you, (and I have read to you every thing that relates to it in the New Testament) can you find any other qualification required;
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and therefore, what right have christians at this day to insist upon any other? The utmost that can fairly be inferred, by any just consequence from the nature of this ordinance is, that, since the custom is peculiar to christians, it may be considered as an open declaration of a man's christianity. The language of it will then be this; By joining in this solemn action in remembrance of Christ, I declare myself a christian, and resolve, by the grace of God, to live and die as becomes a christian; for a resolution to behave as becomes a christian, is the necessary consequence of an honest man's declaring himself to be one. A previous declaration of a man's being a christian is by no means necessary. This action is, itself, the declaration, and a more significant and solemn one than any other.

It is not, my brethren, a declaration of any extraordinary degree of sanctity that you make when you attend the Lord's supper. It is professing no more than you do whenever you say you are christians. At most it is only a more solemn declaration
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of the same thing. If other persons, who have entertained different notions of the Lord's supper, will imagine that you profess more, you are not answerable for their superstition. But, let me seriously admonish you, that you are answerable for your own: and one of the most effectual methods of curing superstition in others, is to show that we are not influenced by it ourselves. While men of known sense and understanding, and, at the same time, men of uprightness and integrity, refrain from the Lord's supper, the common people will imagine, that those men of sense have a very high idea of the sanctity of this ordinance, that they do not think themselves good enough to come to it, and therefore dare not do it. Let your practice, my brethren, satisfy all such persons that they are mistaken. This may make them begin to reflect, and be a means of making them discover their own mistakes about it: otherwise you are guilty of confirming the superstition of numbers; who, by a contrary conduct of yours, might come to think more rationally, first in this, and afterwards in other things too.

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Let it be considered also, that the only opinion which is declared by receiving the Lord's supper is, that Christ is a teacher sent from God; that is, it is a profession of a man's being simply a christian, and not of his attachment to any particular sect or denomination of christians. There could, therefore, be no reason, originally, why a man should refuse to make this declaration in any place, or upon any occasion; that is, why he should scruple to join in this ordinance with any set of persons professing christianity. But since the receiving of the Lord's supper along with any particular sect of christians, is generally considered as a declaration of a man's belonging to that sect, and embracing the peculiar tenets of it; this kind of communion will, by many, be deemed a criminal compliance, and inconsistent with his general principles and conduct: and a person of strict integrity, and who has a proper regard to the sentiments, and even prejudices of others, will not only consider what is the *proper* language of his actions, but what will, in fact, be the language of them in the opinion of others.

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others. It is the *received* acceptation of actions, as well as of words, that ought to be regarded by those who use them. Besides, it becomes every person, who has a just regard for the honour of religion, to bear his testimony against so base a prostitution of its rites, as making them a qualification for a civil office; and there is no doing this to any purpose, but by refusing to comply with those terms, whatever be the consequence.

You say, must not the minister, or the congregation, inquire into the life and conduct of a person, before he be admitted to communion with them. I answer frankly, that I find no such authority committed to any minister, or congregation. Men are directed to examine themselves (though then only with regard to their views in receiving it, in order to distinguish this ordinance from a common meal) but the minister is not directed to examine them; and we must not go beyond our commission. I do not here speak of those vices which are a scandal to human society, and which, according

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ding to the judgment of St. Paul, will justify excommunication : and let it be noted, that, according to the practice of the primitive church, no person was excluded from the Lord's supper, who was not formally excommunicated.

If I be asked, whether it be not hazardous for a person of a dubious, or indifferent character, to receive the Lord's supper. I answer, you may judge for yourselves, by considering, that receiving the Lord's supper, is the same thing as standing up in the face of the world, and saying, *I am a christian*. This declaration, certainly, implies an obligation to live as becomes a christian ; and therefore, if the person who makes it be a bad man, he will be more inexcusable than if he had not been a christian, and could not have made that declaration ; but if a man be, in fact, a christian, the obligation to a christian-like behaviour is much the same, whether he declare his belief of christianity before the world, or not. The one is only a more solemn thing than the other, but precisely of the same

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same nature. They differ only as a common assertion, and an oath; which are both, in a manner, of equal obligation upon an honest man. Besides, coming in a constant way to a place of christian worship is, in fact, a publick declaration of a man's being a christian, and therefore lays him under the same obligation. You, therefore, who are afraid to receive the Lord's supper, have the same reason to be afraid to attend publick and christian worship. Both actions are declarations of your being christians, and of your obligation to live as becomes such; and the one is just as hazardous as the other.

If I be asked, whether particular *preparation* be not necessary to receiving the Lord's supper; I answer freely, that I apprehend nothing more is necessary, than to coming to publick worship in an ordinary way. This act of religion, only requires that serious and composed state of mind, which is a temper that a good man) who never indulges himself in criminal excesses,

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habitually carries about with him; and supposes only that due sense of the nature of what we are about, which may always be recollected at once, without particular preparation. And it is well known, that the primitive christians of the first centuries, received the Lord's supper every Lord's day, as a part of their common worship.

But, in order to explain thoroughly, the chief doubts and scruples which many good christians entertain relating to this subject, I shall, in the second place, briefly point out some of the gross abuses which have been introduced into this institution: but I shall only enumerate a few, the remains of which subsist in many christian churches since the reformation from popery, and are found even among us Dissenters.

The first new idea, which was super-added to the original notion of the Lord's supper, was that of its being a *sacrament*, or an oath to be true to a leader. For the word *sacrament* is not to be found in the scriptures, but was afterwards borrowed from

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from the Latin tongue, in which it signified the oath which a Roman soldier took to his general. Thus, in the first century, Pliny reports, that *the christians were wont to meet together before it was light, and to bind themselves by a sacrament.* This, I would observe, is but a small deviation from the original idea of the Lord's supper; and though it be not the same with the true idea of it, as before explained, yet it cannot be said to be contrary to it.

The next idea which was added to the primitive notion of the Lord's supper, was of a much more alarming nature, and had a long train of the worst of consequences. This was the considering of this institution as a *mystery*. And, indeed, the christians affected very early, to call this rite *one of the mysteries of our holy religion*. By the term *mystery* was meant, originally, the more secret parts of the heathen worship, to which select persons only were admitted, and those under an oath of secrecy. Those mysteries were also called *initiations*; those who were initiated were supposed to be pure,

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and holy ; while those who were not initiated, were considered as impure and profane ; and by these mysteries, the heathens were more attached to their religion, than by any other circumstance whatever. This made the first christians (many of whom were first converted from heathenism, and who could not, all at once, divest themselves of their fondness for pomp and mystery) wish to have something of this nature, which was so striking and captivating, in the christian religion ; and the rite of the Lord's supper soon struck them, as what might easily answer this purpose. When this new idea was introduced, they, in consequence of it, began to exclude all, who did not partake of the ordinance, from being present at the celebration of it. Those who did not communicate, were not even allowed to know the method and manner in which it was administered. Tertullian, who wrote at the end of the second century, defends this practice by the maxims of heathenism. *Pious initiations, he says, drive away the profane ; and it is of the very nature of mysteries to be*

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be concealed, as those of Ceres in Samothrace.

After the introduction of the ideas of mysteries and initiations, it was an easy advance to suppose, with Justin Martyr, and Irenæus, who also wrote in the second century, that there was a divine virtue in the elements of bread and wine.

A divine virtue being now supposed to accompany the administration of the Lord's supper, and the Divine Being himself, thought to be in a more especial manner present upon this occasion, there arose a custom in France or Africa, and some other places, of the communicants making their *offerings* to God ; presenting, according to their abilities, bread or wine, or the like, as the first fruits of their increase ; *it being our duty, as Irenæus says, to offer unto God the first fruits of his creatures.* And this early writer applies a maxim of the Jewish law upon this occasion ; for he adds, as Moses says, *Thou shalt not appear before the Lord empty ; not, says he, as if God wanted these things, but to shew our fruitfulness and gratitude unto him.* Cyprian,
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who wrote in the third century, severely blames the rich matrons for their scanty oblations at these times: *Thou art rich and wealthy, says he, and dost thou think duly to celebrate the Lord's supper, when thou refusest to give. Thou, who comest to the sacrament without a sacrifice, what part canst thou have from the sacrifice which the poor offer up?* These oblations were employed in the relief of the poor, and other uses of the church; and it seems probable, that a sufficient quantity of that bread and wine was presented to the minister who officiated, to be used for the sacramental elements. In Justin Martyr, we find mention of a collection for the poor, made after the administration of the Lord's supper. This, he says, was committed to the care of the bishop, who relieved therewith the orphans, and the widows, the sick, distressed prisoners, travellers, strangers, and, in a word, all that had need thereof. Whether this collection was of the same nature with the offering before the administration is not certain; however, this offering before administration, remains in the

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the church of England to this day; and a collection, not only for the elements, but also for the poor (which is, in the scriptures, said to be the same thing as giving to the Lord) is never omitted upon this occasion among the Dissenters.

This opinion of a divine virtue, and the presence of the Divine Being in the sacrament, and of the communicants having, consequently, a more immediate intercourse with God upon this occasion, would necessarily make it appear a very solemn and awful thing to communicate; because it was an appearing before God. They would naturally apply to this purpose, a saying that was current among the Jews, and which we find in Moses, that *no man can see God and live*; man being a sinful creature, and God infinitely holy. They would also apply to this purpose, the parable of our saviour concerning the wedding supper; and consider the person who had not on the wedding garment, as representing an unworthy communicant: in short, as was very natural, the greater they supposed to be

be the honour and advantage of communicating worthily, the greater would they suppose to be the penalty and danger of communicating unworthily. Upon this, then, the terms of church communion began to be more strict; and a greater purity of heart and life, than was before required, was now thought absolutely necessary. *It does not belong to every one, says Origin, who wrote in the third century, to eat of this bread, and drink of this cup. They must both have been baptised, believe the articles of the christian faith, and, accordingly, live holy and pious lives.*

This advance being made, a taste for eloquence, and an abuse of the figurative language of the scriptures, concurred to carry the corruption of this institution to a degree which would have exceeded the bounds of credibiliy, had it not remained in the church of Rome at this day, as a monument of the utmost extravagance of the human imagination. The Greek writers were always fond of very high strains of eloquence; and, exaggerating the figurative

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rative language of our saviour, *This is my body*, expressed themselves in such a manner, that the people in general came to believe, that Christ himself was, in reality, some way or other, in the sacrament; and, at last, that the elements were his body and blood. Indeed, many pretty early writers speak of an union of the sacramental elements to the body of Christ, like to that of the human being united to the divine in his person. This change of the elements was supposed to be effected by the thanksgiving prayer before the administration; from which the whole service came to be called *the eucharist*; which, in Greek, signifies *the thanksgiving*. Hence Origin calls the sacramental elements, *the food that is sanctified by the word of God and prayer*; and, *that is hallowed by the word of God and prayer*. And Irenæus writes that, *when the bread and wine receive the word of God, they then become the eucharist of the body and blood of Christ*. In general, this action was termed *the consecration of the elements*; and both this term, and the idea annexed to it, still remain in the church of England; and

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and if, in the course of the service, they find they had not consecrated enough, they consecrate more before they use it, repeating the same words over it, as over the first.

Notwithstanding the idea of consecration, and other ideas connected with it (which were introduced pretty early) it was not till about the tenth century, that the extravagant doctrine of *transubstantiation* was fully introduced; and though the strongest language in which this doctrine can be expressed, had been long used in the church, it was not without great debate and altercation, that the language was admitted to be no figure of speech, but literally expressive of the truth of the case. The ambition of the clergy helped forward this, as well as every other error of the church of Rome. In those ignorant and superstitious ages, the clergy were glad of the opportunity of augmenting the respect which people had to their characters, by assuming the sole privilege of performing the greatest and most important action that men could possibly aspire to; namely, that of converting

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verting the elements of bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ.

This doctrine of transubstantiation, and, indeed, the ideas which introduced it, before the doctrine itself was fully established, had some ludicrous, but other very shocking consequences. The consecrated bread, being the real body of Christ, not the least crumb of it must be lost, or applied to any other use. Hence the custom of making the sacramental bread of small light wafers, which might be taken into the mouth at once, without breaking or crumbling; and lest any of the consecrated wine, which was now become the real blood of Christ, should be lost, by wetting the beards of the communicants; they were, for some time, made to suck it through a quill; but the more general custom was, to dip the bread in the wine, and so take both together. At last, considering that the sacramental bread was *the whole body* of Christ, and that a whole body contains the blood, the wine appeared unnecessary; and hence they denied the cup entirely to the laity, who could not partake

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take of it without some loss, or abuse. In the church of England, the minister consecrates only so much of the elements as is deemed sufficient for the communicants; and the rest, as bishop Burnet says, they consume; a practice, which, while it is designed to prevent an irreverent and superstitious use of the elements, tends, in some measure, to promote superstition.

But the worst consequence of this doctrine of transubstantiation was the *adoration of the elements*, and the carrying of the *host*, or sacrifice (that is, the consecrated bread, which was now so called) in procession. And, as it was imagined, that it was God himself who was thus eaten and carried about, all persons must kneel, in adoration, as they received him, or as he passed by them in the streets. Moreover, this sacrament, being considered as a real sacrifice, *viz.* the offering up of the son to the father, whoever procured the celebration of a mass (as this sacrament came to be called, from the form of dismissing the people at the conclusion of it) was thought to procure

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cure a new piece of honour to be done to God ; for the sake of which, he would be reconciled to all who were concerned in it, whether they were living, or in purgatory ; while the minister, who made this sacrifice, performed a true act of priesthood, and reconciled sinners to God. Thus the celebration of the mass, for the dead, or the living, came to be considered as the most meritorious of all religious actions ; great endowments were made for this purpose only, and it became quite a trade ; many of the priests having no other subsistence but what they got by this means, saying a certain number of masses, at certain hours in the day or night, at a fixed price. For this purpose, many altars were erected to different saints in every church, and many masses were said all day long, by different persons, at every altar. In short, almost the whole of the Roman catholic religion now consists in these masses ; and what we mean by social worship, distinct from communion, is a thing, in a manner, unknown among them. Hence, also, this institution, which, originally and properly, was

was a social act, came to be celebrated in private; and the consecrated bread always carried to sick and dying persons in particular, as a necessary means of reconciling them to God, and procuring the pardon of their sins, before they left the world.

When the abuses of this institution were advanced thus far, and the receiving of the consecrated elements was considered as conveying the pardon of sin; confession to a priest was made to precede the celebration of mass in Roman catholic countries; and among them, when a man has confessed to a priest, and received mass, he has no doubt of his salvation, whatever his crimes have been.

Absurd as this doctrine of transubstantiation appears, and horrid as are its consequences, it was the great bulwark of the Popish cause at the time of the reformation; and it is a fact, that, in no part of the controversy, were the reformers more puzzled by the Popish disputants; and this was the last error that Cranmer, Ridley, and
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many others of the most eminent champions of the reformation, relinquished. The reason was, that this was one of the earliest corruptions of christianity; things that favour very strongly of it, appear in the writings of the first centuries; and, so long as any regard was paid to the fathers, and arguments were allowed to be fetched from them in publick disputations, the advantage could not but lie on the side of popery: nor did the reformers ever get clear of this great difficulty and embarrassment, till Chillingworth boldly declared, the *bible only contained the religion of Protestants*. Luther, bold as he was in other things, was content to go a middle way in this; and admitted what he called *consubstantiation*, or that both the elements of real bread and wine, and also the body and blood of Christ were, in some manner, present in the sacrament.

And when it was thought by all the reformers, that the receiving of the sacrament did not absolve from sin, it was still generally imagined, that men ought to be holy

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and absolved before they received it. Hence, the forms of confession and absolution precede the receiving of the elements in the church of England; and by Dissenters, the receiving of the sacrament was considered as a kind of receiving Christ, in some mystical, tho' not a proper and carnal sense. And, so long as there remains a notion of any peculiar presence of Christ in the sacrament, and consequently the idea of some extraordinary virtue being communicated by it, it is no wonder that a long train of awful ideas accompany every thought about the Lord's supper, and that it is approached by us with an undue and superstitious reverence.

Indeed, I do not see how this superstition can be rooted out, so long as the *thirty-nine articles* are considered as the standard of faith in the church of England, and the *Assembly's catechism* among so many Dissenters. In the twenty-fifth article of the church of England, it is said, that *sacraments ordained by Christ be not only badges, or tokens, of christian men's profession; but*
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rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's will towards us; by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen, and confirm our faith in him.

In the Assembly's catechism, a sacrament is defined to be *an holy ordinance, instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers. The Lord's supper, in particular, is said to be a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but, by faith, are partakers of his body and blood, with all its benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.* Agreeable to these ideas, it is there said, that *it is required of them who would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves, of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest coming unwor-*

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thily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Bishop Burnet, the most rational (and I shall not be misunderstood, if I say too rational an expositor of the articles of the church of England) plainly countenances a superstitious regard to the sacraments. He says, p. 332, that the Lord's supper is *above the nature of an anniversary, or memorial feast*; and we do not doubt, but that *Christ, who instituted those sacraments, does still accompany them with a particular presence in them, and a blessing upon them*; so that we, coming to them with minds well prepared, do certainly receive, in and with them, particular largesses of the favour and bounty of God. A sacrament, he says, is an institution of Christ, in which some material thing is sanctified, by the use of some form, or words, in and by which, federal acts of this religion do pass on both sides; on ours, by stipulation, profession, or vows; and on God's, by his secret assistances. To these federal acts, he afterwards says, a conveyance of divine grace is tied; and his whole account

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account of the sacrament is in the same strain.

The Dissenters have even gone deeper into this superstition than the divines of the church of England. Retaining fewer rites and ceremonies, they have made so much the more of them. For this I may appeal to almost every thing the Dissenters have written on this subject, particularly to Mr. Henry's treatise on the sacrament (which, I believe, is more read than any other, and of which I think I have seen the eleventh edition) and more especially to that chapter in it, which is intitled *Sights to be seen at the Lord's table*.

Hence it is, that an account of what is called persons' experience in religion, as an evidence of their being in a state of grace, and having a title to heaven, is required in some of our congregations, before they can be admitted to communion. Hence something of the idea of the validity of the administration of this ordinance by a regular minister, and the notion of the necessity of

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ordination, previous to his performing this service; which, to our shame be it spoken, remains among most of us; as if this service required some extraordinary powers, which could only be conferred in a supernatural manner, by the imposition of hands, in the ceremony of ordination; and was of a different nature from other ministerial functions, which ministers are, without scruple, allowed to perform before they are ordained. All this is but a small deviation from maxims evidently Popish. Lastly, from the same source it is, that we have days set apart for solemn preparation before the receiving of the sacrament, among all our denominations. It is not denied, but that these days may be spent to good purpose; but care should be taken, that they be not made a handle for superstition: for, I am free to say, that these days of preparation for the sacrament, are nothing more than the remains of Popery. Indeed, it was impossible that there should have been any such thing in primitive times; when the Lord's supper was received every Lord's day, as part of their common worship,

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From this superstitious regard to the Lord's supper, and the air of solemnity and mystery which still remains about it, we some times find societies of sensible and thinking men, possessed of minds free from other vulgar prejudices, to be very large; and yet the number of communicants very small; a thing which I would willingly contribute to rectify.

Permit me now, my brethren, to intreat you to show your regard to genuine christianity; and, at the same time, your freedom from superstition, by joining, as often as you conveniently can, in receiving the Lord's supper. If you be christians, you cannot but reverence and respect Jesus Christ, and entertain in your minds a very high idea of the benefits accruing to you, and to all mankind, by his life and death. Take, then, this opportunity, of the celebration of this social and chearful rite, of recollecting those benefits, of cherishing in your minds a grateful sense of them, and of rejoicing in the glorious prospect of immortal life, which the gospel of Christ opens to you. If

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If you be christians, and are not ashamed of being thought such (as, indeed, your stated attendance upon christian worship declares) permit me to call upon you to stand forth, and declare yourselves christians, by this solemn act, appointed for that purpose.

If you be christians, you necessarily acknowledge yourselves to lie under peculiar obligations to a virtuous life. I call upon you to own, and, in some measure, to strengthen this obligation, by a more public profession of christianity; and let it be a motive with you to a stricter watch over your thoughts, words, and actions; that in nothing you may act unworthily of the gospel of God, whereof you make profession.

God forbid that I should recommend this ordinance to you, as instrumental in procuring the pardon of sin, or as a necessary means of salvation. On the contrary, if any opinion would authorise our excluding a person from the Lord's supper, it would be this, which leads to so gross and dangerous

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gerous an abuse of it. I would only recommend the custom as recommended by Christ to all his followers, and clearly understood to be so by the apostles, who promoted it in the earliest times of christianity. It is a custom which, I think, we cannot object to, unless we see some good reason to think that the apostles themselves might misapprehend our Lord's meaning, and have fallen into a mistake in this case; and I do not see how this can be supposed.

I would not, however, be understood to censure any man, or body of men, who do not chuse to celebrate this institution: least of all would I censure the Quakers, or others who may think this to be no institution of Christ. With that persuasion, they certainly ought not to communicate; and it would be the height of uncharitableness, to think that they could not be virtuous men, and even good christians without it.

I do not greatly condemn you who do believe the Lord's supper to be an institution of Christ, and yet neglect to receive it.

it. I can easily make allowance for the influence of early prejudices upon the human mind; and am sensible how far the rectification of a man's judgment must precede the reformation of his conduct, in such a case as this. Habits, founded on prejudices of long standing, do not easily, or soon, give way to mere mental conviction,

Lastly, I by no means think harshly of those persons whose sentiments may, after all, be totally different from mine in this respect; and who may pay, what I cannot help calling, an undue and superstitious regard to this ordinance. It cannot be supposed, that all the errors and abuses of popery, which were accumulating, and gathering strength, during a course of fifteen hundred years, should be rectified in the space of two or three centuries. The expectation would be unreasonable, and what nothing that we know of human nature, and of the history of mankind, would warrant. Some kinds of errors are so intimately connected with truth, and some kinds

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kinds of superstition with real virtue, that no separation can be attempted, without equal danger to both. It is better, therefore, in this case, according to our saviour's excellent advice, to let a few tares grow up with the wheat (if they be of such a nature as to suffer the wheat to grow along with them) than endanger the rooting up of the wheat and them together.

I hope, my brethren, that this is not your case, and that many of you, at least, are so far advanced in a just freedom of thinking in matters of religion, that you may drop a superstitious regard to the Lord's supper, without losing your reverence for real vital religion. But while we, in the first place, take care to preserve inviolate the strictest regard to vital and practical religion (which is the only thing that is *fundamental* in it) let us not wholly neglect taking some pains to free ourselves from more and more antichristian errors, till we leave no *mark of the beast* remaining upon us. For I am afraid that even we, who think ourselves the farthest advanced
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in our reformation from popery, have still a great deal of that immense and complicated system of faith, of practice, of habits, and of prejudices adhering to us; and while so much zeal is shown against the outward profession of popery by others, let us not be wholly inattentive to the remains of it secretly lurking within ourselves.

An undue regard to this institution, is the greatest strong-hold of superstition now remaining among Dissenters. The members of the established church, fettered as they are with prescribed forms of worship, ecclesiastical canons, confessions, and articles of faith, together with the rest of a whole system of hierarchy, are to be pitied, and not much to be blamed, for their making so little progress in the great work of a farther reformation from popery; but as for us Dissenters, we have no excuse, if, uncumbered as we are with such a load of superstitious observances, and having no bias upon our judgments or consciences, we do not take advantage of our happy situation, to rescue our minds more and more from a
subjection

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subjection to slavish prejudices. Enjoying the singular privilege of letting our judgment direct our practice, let our sentiments be free, and our conduct, in all respects, rational and manly.

Very sorry should I be if, by this easy representation of the institution of the Lord's supper, I should, all the while, prove to be defeating my own purpose; which is to persuade you to the observance of it: yet, I own, that a very little knowledge of human nature, may justly give me some reason to apprehend such a consequence. Things that are difficult of access often raise a desire superior to the difficulty. We naturally imagine, that what is not easy to be obtained is worth obtaining; and, having once got that idea, the difficulty vanishes. Nay, the idea of difficulty only serves to enhance the imaginary value of the object, and make us the more eager and determined in our pursuit; while things that are easy of access, are neglected because they are so. What is cheaply purchased, we think is not worth the purchase; and therefore, we do

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do not think it worth our while to give ourselves any trouble about it.

Things that are mysterious and incomprehensible, have the same natural advantage over the mind of man, and especially vulgar and uninstructed minds ; which are peculiarly apt to be dazzled with what appears great, awful, and above their comprehension. The more mysterious and wonderful a thing appears to be, the more closely doth it engage our attention ; if any thing like an idea can be formed of it, we are delighted, as being masters of a secret not easily accessible to others ; and, on that account, grow the more strongly attached to it ; while things that are easy and intelligible, are slighted, as common, and not worth the trouble of a thought. The final cause of this part of our constitution is obvious : for hereby we are made to attend more closely to things that are difficult of comprehension ; and so, by degrees, we acquire a just knowledge of them ; whereas, if it had been the nature of man to fly from things mysterious and unintelligible, we should

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should always have remained in ignorance. But then, you see, from this very circumstance, that the proper design of this natural propensity to things mysterious and difficult, was to promote a rational investigation of their nature and properties, and not that we should acquiesce in them, and remain enraptured with them, while they were mysterious. All that is of real value to us is the truth; and the plainer and more intelligible it is made, the better, and more useful it is. Do not then, my brethren, despise christianity because it is made a rational and intelligible religion. Do not despise the few positive institutions of it, because their nature and uses are easy to be understood. Do not throw off the yoke of Christ because it is easy, and refuse his burthens, because they are light.

To conclude; let us bless God, that while speculative truth is a thing that is often difficult to be attained; all the great practical truths of religion are so plain, that *he that runs may read them*. Amidst all the diversity of opinions, which has prevailed in the christian world, all sects and parties agree in

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in the great duties of human life. They equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, in order to live and die in his favour, so as to secure a happy immortality. And, notwithstanding some sects do, in words, subvert the foundations of all virtue, they have always some *salvo*, whereby they preserve a regard to it, and, in reality, enforce it. Such a foundation has the God of nature laid for the practice of virtue in our hearts, that it is hardly in the power of any error in our heads to erase it.

You have now, my brethren, seen what, according to my best judgment, is the true state of this case. You have seen the plain and simple account which the Evangelists, and St. Paul, give us of the institution of the Lord's supper. To this let us adhere. You have also seen what have been the additions, and inventions of men, with respect to it. These, let us nobly dare to reject; and, henceforth, *stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free.*

T H E E N D.





